

Hobbies

Very rare coins still alive in dying market

By Roger Boye

Exceedingly rare coins still are fetching top prices at public auctions while the market in general continues to slide.

In a California sale last month, a collector paid \$1.87 million for a set of gold "pattern coins" dated 1872. All six of the test coins depict the head of Liberty and a defiant eagle, and five of the rarities once were owned by King Farouk of Egypt.

Although the gold pieces fetched a bit less than some pre-sale estimates, they still rank as the second most valuable coin set sold at auction. Last May, two persons paid \$3.19 million for the nine-coin "King of Siam" set.

Also in October, one of 12 known 1894-S dimes sold for \$93,500 in a New York auction conducted by Stack's. The company also auctioned a 1795 U.S. silver dollar for \$187,000 (quoted prices include a 10 percent buyer's fee).

Meanwhile, the Coin World "Trends Index" reported that the rare-coin market is trading sharply lower, with prices falling for most types of silver dollars, half dollars and commemoratives, among others. Trends Editor Keith M. Zaner attributed the downward spiral to several factors, including the crisis in the Persian Gulf, recession fears and news of the Federal Trade Commission's investigation of the Professional Coin Grading Service.

(In August, PCGS agreed to run disclosures in its advertisements and take other actions. Promotions of the PCGS—the country's largest and most respected coin-grading service—now must say, "Certification by PCGS does not guarantee protection against the normal risks associated with potentially volatile markets.")

In September, prices of coins in the uncirculated grade classification of "MS-65" dropped almost 17 percent in value, with certain types of silver dollars down nearly 25 percent, according to Coin World. The overall index—based on a survey of about 16,500 coin values—dropped 4.27 percent in September.

Likewise, Numismatic News reported in the Oct. 30 issue that the market "is an absolute mess and the past few days have been a worst case scenario for many dealers." Lower gold and silver prices have hurt business while "the upper end of the market is suffering from what some are referring to as a 'meltdown,'" wrote News editor Robert Wilhite in the Coin Market section.

Several weeks ago, Robert R. Prechter Jr., editor of "The Elliott Wave Theorist" newsletter, predicted in a Coin World article that the bull market for old coins is ending and that collectors could delay purchases for two or three years "when probabilities suggest that prices will be lower."

The British Royal Mint is selling special medallions commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, the great World War II air battle where "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The medallion depicts three types of aircraft—two British and one German—that participated in the battle and an aerial combat scene with vapor trails.

To order, write to the British Royal Mint, P.O. Box 2570, Woodside, N.Y. 11377 or call (800) 221-1215. A sterling silver specimen—about twice the weight of a U.S. silver dollar and containing more than 1.5 ounces of silver—costs \$64.50 and a slightly smaller medallion made of copper and nickel costs \$12.50.



Weekly newspaper Coin World is charging \$15.95 for the new edition of its Coin World Almanac, one of the most useful hobby-related books.

The sixth edition—the first revision in three years—includes entries on coins as investments, U.S. paper money, and coin grading, among other topics. An expanded index and table of contents make the book more user-friendly. For a copy of the 752-page tome, send a check to Coin World Almanac, P.O. Box 150, Sidney, Ohio 45365. A limited-edition hard-cover almanac costs \$29.95.

